

FILED

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEW MEXICO**

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO**

JUL 30 2004

RONNY GARCIA,

Plaintiff,

v.

No. CIV-04-0552 MCA/LAM

CLERK

RUTH WHEELER,

Defendant.

MEMORANDUM OPINION AND ORDER

This matter is before the Court, *sua sponte* under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(c)(2) and Fed.R.Civ.P. 12(b)(6), to review Plaintiff's civil rights complaint. Plaintiff is incarcerated, appearing pro se, and proceeding in forma pauperis. For the reasons below, Plaintiff's complaint will be dismissed.

The Court has the discretion to dismiss an in forma pauperis complaint *sua sponte* under §1915(c)(2) "at any time if the action . . . is frivolous or malicious; [or] fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted." The Court also may dismiss a complaint *sua sponte* under Fed.R.Civ.P. 12(b)(6) for failure to state a claim if "it is 'patently obvious' that the plaintiff could not prevail on the facts alleged, and allowing him an opportunity to amend his complaint would be futile." *Hall v. Bellmon*, 935 F.2d 1106, 1109 (10th Cir. 1991) (quoting *McKinney v. Oklahoma Dep't of Human Services*, 925 F.2d 363, 365 (10th Cir. 1991)). In reviewing Plaintiff's pro se complaint, the Court applies the same legal standards applicable to pleadings drafted by counsel but is mindful that the complaint must be liberally construed. *Northington v. Jackson*, 973 F.2d 1518, 1520-21 (10th Cir. 1992).


The complaint alleges that Defendant Wheeler, a state public defender, was appointed to

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represent Plaintiff in his state criminal proceeding. Defendant allegedly failed to properly investigate the case, call certain witnesses, or present certain evidence. Plaintiff claims these actions amounted to ineffectiveness and violated certain unspecified federal protections. He seeks damages and asks that Defendant be disbarred.

Plaintiff's allegations fail to state a claim against the Defendant public defender on which relief can be granted. A complaint under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 must allege facts demonstrating the two elements of the statute: that a federal right was violated and the deprivation was caused by a person acting "under color of state law." See *Gomez v. Toledo*, 446 U.S. 635, 640 (1980); *Houston v. Reich*, 932 F.2d 883, 890 (10th Cir. 1991). In the absence of a factual basis for either element a complaint does not state a claim under § 1983. See, e.g., *Baker v. McCollan*, 443 U.S. 137, 140 (1979) (stating that a civil rights complaint must allege a violation of a federally protected right); *Polk County v. Dodson*, 454 U.S. 312, 316 (1981) (noting that plaintiff must allege violation was committed by person acting "under color of state law"). Case law is clear that, absent a conspiracy, a public defender undertaking a defense does not act under color of state law for purposes of § 1983. *Polk County*, 454 U.S. at 325; *Harris v. Champion*, 51 F.3d 901, 909-10 (10th Cir. 1995). The complaint will be dismissed. See *Steele v. Federal Bureau of Prisons*, 355 F.3d 1204, 1215 (10th Cir. 2003) (Hartz, J., concurring) ("dismissal with prejudice . . . might not preclude the plaintiff from proceeding in state court").

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that Plaintiff's complaint is DISMISSED; and, pursuant to Fed.R.Civ.P. 58(a)(2)(A)(iii), a form of judgment will be entered in accordance with this opinion.


UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE